From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous*

[You have agreed to participate in an oral interview: Hélène Cixous has written about the danger of the “spoken word” with regards to “thinking.” The voice also plays a role here: it has an important place in both of your texts.]

Jacques Derrida: Those who do not read me reproach me at times for playing writing against the voice, as if to reduce it to silence. In truth, I proposed a re-elaboration and a generalization of the concept of writing, of text or of trace. Orality is also the inscription [frayage] of a trace. But the serious treatment of these problems requires time, patience, retreat, writing in the narrow sense. I have difficulty improvising about the questions which count the most for me. Our three voices are setting out on a formidable and singular exercise here: to give each other the floor [la parole], to let each other speak in order to trace out an unpredictable path. Our words should form more than one angle, they should triangulate, play at interrupting each other even while they are articulated together. Yes, for Hélène and for me, despite an abyssal difference, writing models itself on voice. Interior or not, the voice always stages itself, or is always staged. I write “out loud [à voix haute]” or “in a low voice [à voix basse].” For my seminar as well as for texts which are not meant to be pronounced. For more than forty years I have written what I teach from the first word to the last; I try out in advance the rhythm and the tonality of what, pretending to improvise, I will “vocalize” in the lecture theater. I never write in silence, I listen to myself, or I listen to the dictation of another voice, of more than one voice: staging, therefore, dance, scenography of terms, of breath and of “changes in tone.” The preparation of a seminar is like a path of freedom [chemin de la liberté]: I can let myself speak, take all the time which is given to me in writing. For publication, as it involves texts of very different genres, each time the register of the voice changes.

Hélène Cixous: We both have several writing practices. One that uses what is called the speaking voice [la voix qu’on dit haute], but which for


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me is meager and unequivocal, which is on the order of teaching; another that silently gets deeper and deeper with the degrees of writing, which seems to be without voice, whereas in a single voice it makes a chorus of voices be heard. When you write your seminars you foresee [pré-voix], your voice is a pre-voice, you write a text in order to respeak it. This respeaking is a theatricalization of what is already a staging. You double the theatrical stakes. You are the actor performing what you write as an author. You double yourself—in all ways. I don’t write my seminars. For days I travel through a region of multiple texts by ramifications crossings grafts until I can think them through by heart. Then I improvise for four or five hours with two pages of notes serving as a seedbed. I have this need to let myself be haunted by voices coming from my elsewheres that resonate through me. I want to have voices. As a result I am at the mercy of their inspiration [insufflement]. They can fail me. I master nothing, I submit to the oracles. This risk is the condition of my creative energy and of my discoveries. It can happen that I run out of breath [souffle], that something loses steam [s'essouffle]. I saw myself clearly in your incredible text on Artaud, La parole soufflée, in this bivalence of the soufflé: a word whispered/given by someone else, and a word stolen, whisked away. We both let the word take its flight: this release of the word like the release of a bird or a breath: let go something that will have made a crossing. Choreographilosopher, coryphaeus, choir, you make the text dance, waltz, turn, go out of control, even rap [dérapet même rapper] along with your supremely precise and improvisational thought. A flight of texts. I have rather the feeling of song, of music. Where does it come to me from? Beautiful ancient voices lead me, those of my ancestors?

Jacques Derrida: The parole soufflée is also the dictation of more than one voice (masculine and feminine). They weave together, intertwine, replace each other. Always more than one voice that I let resonate with differences in pitch, timbre, and tone: so many others, men or women, who speak in me. Who speak (to) me. As if I ventured to take responsibility for a sort of choir to which I should nonetheless render justice. In countersigning, to confirm, going with or against the other, that which comes to me from more than one other (masculine or feminine). Other unconsiouses also intervene, or the silhouettes of known or unknown addressees, for whom I speak and who let me speak [me donnent la parole], who give me their word [me donnent leur parole].

First Encounter

[This dialogue between the two of you has lasted for forty years. Did your first meeting at the brasserie Le Balzar, in 1963, leave traces, sediments of voice?]
Jacques Derrida: It would be difficult for me to evoke here, in improvising, the concrete and living traces of my encounter with Hélène. There was her first card after reading *Force et signification*, the first face-to-face at the Balzar, yes. But I am not sure that the effect of these experiences survives intact. I remember the first manuscript Hélène confided in me (*Le prénom de Dieu*). It arrived like a meteor in my garden. The cultural or socioeditorial field, the “readership” of the time was not ready, it seemed to me (was I mistaken?), to receive and to measure what was beginning there. So I feared for her in the course of the reading, with this double feeling: dazzlement and anxiety.

Hélène Cixous: Around the same scenes, my feelings were slightly different. Everything was put in place for me when I nonsaw him the first of the first times. What was inscribed in what came to be a sort of legend for me—that is, something legible—is that I nonsaw him: I only heard him. It was an extraordinary accident. I was eighteen years old. It was at the Sorbonne, he was taking his *agrégation,* I was way in the back of the lecture theater, I “saw” only his back. I saw only his voice. He was speaking of that which has eternally interested me: the question of death. I was seized by nothing other than his absolutely other language, so powerfully alive, thinking the question of death. It was for me the opening of thought and literature. Years later I wrote him after having read his first texts. Thereafter, each time it was the same: I nonsaw him. It was a sort of prophetic phantasm where he was the prophet. I wrote this in *Quelle heure est-il?* I saw not his person but his *being* walking on the crest of a mountain. At our first encounter, at the Balzar, we spoke for a long time and about Joyce. We progressed step by step around a limit-work, we were at the limit, each coming from our own edge trying to think “the thing.” My way of nonseeing was visionary: one nonsees what one has to see otherwise. In describing in *Spectres de Marx* the visor effect, he makes his own self-portrait. He has a helmet [*heaume*] (what word of words: home homme heaume, om), a natural visor, he looks without being seen. *Unheimlich.* The being, this man, stays back and looks at you. All you have is the letter. From the beginning, what I have seen is his language, in which I knew my thought could wander. I have never stopped reading him meticulously and each time it is as if I was *seeing* what he thinks. The person that he is, which has an appearance and is part of my life, is the incarnation of his thought in his language, “Derridian.” He is the speech of this language. This Derridianized French language, he ransoms it, unmakes it, scours it, plays out its idiomatic potential, awakens the words buried under forgetfulness. He resuscitates it. When I heard him I found the liberty I needed: of course this liberty existed in Rimbaud, but with Jacques Derrida poetry began to gallop philosophy.
Jacques Derrida: From a certain point of view, that of writing itself, if I may put it that way, Hélène reads me in an incomparable manner. She immediately finds the best access, the most secret, to the forge and to the form, to the meaning and unconscious body of what I write. My gratitude for this is boundless.

Writers, Jews, from Algeria

[In Monolingualism of the Other, Jacques Derrida explains that this language that unites you was forged in shared origins. You are both “Writers, Jews, from Algeria.”]

Jacques Derrida: In the beginning (it was however just after the “Algerian War”), our shared origins were not very present in our exchanges. Later, in an increasingly acute manner, we became aware of this. I began to write on “my” Algeria, on my childhood, Judaism, etc., with The Postcard, Monolingualism of the Other, Circumfession, etc. Beyond all that we share in this sense, it is only too obvious that we write texts as dissimilar as could be. Our altercations with the French language are also different. We don’t have the same training. Although my taste for literature came first, I am a “philosopher.” I began by trying to have my philosophical work be legitimized by the academic institution. Before taking a certain number of liberties with writing, it was necessary that I first be accorded a certain amount of credit. Before this, I betrayed the norms only in a prudent, cunning, and quasi-clandestine manner. Though this didn’t escape everyone. My strange and stormy passion for the French language freed itself bit by bit. I remain obstinately monolingual, without any natural access to another language. I read German, I can teach in English, but my attachment to French is absolute. Inflexible. Whereas through her origins, which are not only Sephardic but also, by her mother, Ashkenazi, Hélène has a native relationship to German. And reads many other languages.

Hélène Cixous: When we met, we were each in our own way busy trying to approach the shimmering heart of the French language, to speak to it intimately [à la tutoyer]. For me, also coming from my other languages. We are each foreign otherwise. And this foreignness also presided over our first encounter: he perceived me as foreign, even to his world, for this part of me which he calls Ashkenazi and which for me is German. What brings together our dissimilarities is a thematized experience of the inside of the outside. My imagination was marked by the first
experience of my childhood, the event he would say. I was two-and-a-half years old and suddenly my father was a lieutenant-doctor, in 1939: I had the right to enter this place of admission and exclusion that in Oran was called the Cercle Militaire. I enter into this garden: and I was not inside. I had the Experience: one can be inside without being inside, there is an inside in the inside, an outside in the inside and this goes on infinitely. In this place which had appeared to me like paradise, hell gaped: I was not able to enter into that into which I had been admitted; I was excluded because of my Jewish origins. And everything is inextricable. I did not understand it until the other children spit the message of rejection on me. I have never stopped living the exclusion, without it bothering me or becoming a home. The passage between the inside and the outside is found in everything I write, as in all of Jacques Derrida’s thought. I did not know that he had in the beginning been concerned with legitimizing his presence in philosophy. The secret alien that he is inscribed something else in his texts. In any case, I had the impression of slipping into The Origin of Geometry, The Voice and the Phenomenon through secret cracks, through literature, benefiting from explosions that were illuminations and destinies for me. One of these books was placed under the epigraph of Edgar Allen Poe. In the other, Jacques Derrida slipped Joyce into the middle of Husserl. Through literature he gave me access to philosophy, showing me its arrow slits and draw-bridges; I slipped through underground passages. The question of the presence of the, of the present of presence, of survival, was already at work. And even of the henceforth. We had experienced expulsion by Vichy. I was three years old when I watched my father unscrew his doctor’s signboard. We share what I have called nosblessures, “ournoblewounds”: wounds [blessures], but ours [nos] and they become our title to nobility [noblese]. We have been able to understand each other to the tenth of a word, because the work of stigmatization, of the scar, was originally inscribed in the life-book of both of us.

[When Hélène Cixous writes, in Rootprints, “We are from the same garden,” are you alluding to the garden of the Cercle militaire?]

Jacques Derrida: “We are from the same garden” could open onto all the world’s gardens. But the literal reference is first the Jardin d’Essai, a botanical park, in Algiers, with tropical trees, next to a soccer stadium where I often played. This Garden still exists. We have never been there together, but it represents a sort of paradise lost. In H.C. for life, the word essai (trial, attempt, essay) overwrites itself, imposing its letters and its syntax at a crossroads of sentences and “logics.”
Hélène Cixous: French literature begins with the Essais. It is a book of c’est, “it is.” It’s extraordinary—a garden called d’Essai. The Latin Esse to be.

In the Beginning, There is the Word

[For both of you, writing draws on words, takes off from a word play, an expression that nourishes the progression of thought and even, at times, the progression of the narrative.]

Hélène Cixous: One could make a poem with nothing but the titles of his books. While Writing and Difference was grammatically proper, as time goes on, the words start playing more and more, causing zeugmas, and a certain number of texts are engendered by a brilliant word in the French language brilliantly replayed in Derridian. Fichus! Who would have thought? And Demeur! Béliers! I envy his titles. His hypersensibility to what French words conceal both follitterally and philosophonically.

Jacques Derrida: Yes, in the beginning there is the word. Both the nomination and the term. As if I think nothing before writing: surprised by some resource of the French language that I did not invent, I make of it something that was not programmed but already rendered possible by the lexical and syntactic treasure trove. Hence this overloaded feeling: jubilation, mission accomplished in the service of the language—and a certain irresponsibility. It is all mine, but it comes to me from the language—which does without me in passing through me. During a recent interview the expression jurer avec came to me by surprise: it meant exactly what I was looking for: “to clash with,” but at the same time “to countersign,” “to swear with, to speak under oath with . . .” And then “to swear with” this conspiracy [conjuration] itself. Miracle: I was not thinking of this a second before. I then exploited the resources of this untranslatable expression. Juré avec cannot be translated into another language while preserving the multiplicity and the contradiction that a certain use of the expression can have. Untranslatability is always what guides me: that the sentence is eternally indebted to idiom. The body of the word should be inseparable from the meaning to such an extent that translation can only lose it. In an apparent paradox, translators have been much more interested in my texts than the French themselves, in trying to reinvent in their language the experience I have just described. For example, once I retained H.C. pour la vie as the most just title, I organized my text in such a way as to philosophically exploit the resources of the idiom on different registers: the minute analysis of texts
by Hélène, by Freud, of an affirmative thought of life, etc. It is the contingent chance of her name and initials: Hélène Cixous.\textsuperscript{5} \textit{C’est pour la vie} means at once faithful and unfailing friendship, “forever,” “for life,” but also the \textit{pour la vie} which is for her an affirmation, a taking sides with life which I have never been able to share. I am not “against life,” but neither am I “for life” like her. This discord is at the heart of the book—and of life.

\textbf{Hélène Cixous:} You are against death and fiercely for life. But otherwise. Dis/qiuededly. As for titles, I had to do my mourning in the translation of \textit{Portrait de Jacques Derrida en jeune saint juif}. In \textit{en jeune saint juif}, “as a young saint,” can be heard \textit{en jeune singe}, “as a young monkey.” I would have liked for the monkey to have survived, but that didn’t work.

\textbf{Jacques Derrida:} Hélène’s texts are translated across the world, but they remain untranslatable. We are two French writers who cultivate a strange relationship, or a strangely familiar, familiarly strange (\textit{unheimlich}, uncanny) relationship with the French language—at once more translated and more untranslatable than many a French author. We are more rooted in the French language than those with ancestral roots in this culture and this land.

\textbf{From the Word to Life}

[The process that you describe beginning with the word can appear very abstract. To the contrary, both of you write books that are marked by autobiography, therefore by life itself: words bring back to life.]

\textbf{Jacques Derrida:} Since \textit{Le prénom de Dieu}, Hélène’s books have been fictional and fantastical, fantastmatic, certainly, but also enriched by her singular, even familial, history. For me it is very different! In my first books, there are no biographical hints or signals. They are autobiographical—if they are at all—in another manner. It is very late, with \textit{Circumfession}, \textit{The Monolingualism of the Other}, etc., that, in a more or less fictive style, I made references to what is called “my life.” The “I” has a fictive status there, of course, but which is different from that which it had in my first texts where I said “I” or “we” in the abstract fashion of the philosopher or classical theoretician. Our trajectories are thus very different, with regard to the relationship between the “word” and “life,” and to the life of the word.
Hélène Cixous: Nonetheless, even if everything I have written is thought through from experiences I have had, I find myself relatively absent from my texts considered to be autobiographical. The essential part of what I have been is completely secret. I write from this tension between what is hidden and what comes about, that is, the book. The book comes to me, it has a power superior to that of the person who believes she is writing the book. My books are stronger than I am, they escape me. They submit me to translation.

Jacques Derrida: But ever since your first books, the so-called “autobiographical” vein irrigates an underground stratum that is absolute, even if it gives birth to an immense familial mythology: the dead father is always there, the “true” father! And the brother. Later there is the mother.

Hélène Cixous: I don’t deny that the family is there, but my family is not all me. In addition it is my invention, as my mother says. And it is the primitive structure of every human being. It is that which causes Greek tragedy, it is a mythical construction from which I reflect on the destinies of all human beings. As for you, your philosophical problematics are sorts of self-portraits. It has to do, always already, with your soul, your psyche, your body in passion, your dislocations. The being behind your letters is you otherwise and more naked than Rousseau, your philosophy is a transparent veil. All your books constitute an autobiography of an unknown genre written “interiorly and on the skin.”

Jacques Derrida: I would hope so, but if it were true, it will have been so above all after the fact, retrospectively.

[Is what Hélène Cixous describes as the presence of the body in Jacques Derrida’s texts an element of this autobiography of an unknown genre?]

Hélène Cixous: In all of his texts a naïveté is manifest, something native. He writes the autobiography of his body as a stigmatized body, a body of blood and of signs. He had the extraordinary audacity to show that the philosopher writes with all his body, that philosophy can only be brought into this world by a being in flesh in blood in sex in sweat, in sperm and in tears, with all his physical and psychic circumcisions and scarifications. It is unique, and unprecedented. This stranjewish body which fears trembles climaxes and triumphs reveals what it hides. He cannot lie.
The Values of Truth

Jacques Derrida: You see what Hélène’s friendship gives me: she is undoubtedly the only person who thinks I never lie. Even when I lie (which I have to do sometimes, like everyone, perhaps a bit less), I remain (according to her) innocent. I am taken to be someone who questions the value of truth, who thinks twice about it at least, and always submits it to questions of history (there is a history of “values of truth”), so much so that my enemies consider me, wrongly of course, to be a skeptic or nihilist. However, when something appears to me to be “true” (but I am now giving this word an altogether different meaning that I cannot explain here), no power in the world, no torture could keep me from saying so. It’s not about courage or defiance, it is an irresistible impulse. If I have to interrogate in a critical manner the work of a respected author, I am conscious of the risk I take but I can’t keep myself from doing it: when something should be said, it is said. And when it passes through me, no dam can contain it.

Hélène Cixous: This procedure [démarche] of truth is for me the gift you give to humanity. In reading you we learn that the truth is always a bit further on. From the place where you arrive, you set off again, you take yourself back up, you relaunch yourself, you do not sit the truth on your knees. Truth makes you tick [La vérité te fait marcher] in all the senses of the word. It’s also the law of writing: one can only write in the direction of that which does not let itself be written and which one must try to write. What I can write is already written, it is no longer of interest. I always head towards the most frightening. This is what makes writing thrilling but painful. I write towards what I flee. I dream about it. It is always a jardin d’Essai, but it is an infernal, expelling garden.

Between Possible and Impossible

Jacques Derrida: We come again to the theme of the impossible. Pardoning is possible only when one pardons what is impossible to pardon. If one pardons what is pardonable, in exchange for repentance or a request for pardon, one does not pardon. Pardoning is only possible for the impardonable. Therefore the possibility depends on the impossible. This goes also for the gift, hospitality. Unconditional hospitality is impossible. But it is the only hospitality possible and worthy of the name. I could give any number of concepts obeying the same logic, where the only possibility of the thing is the experience of impossibility. If one does only what one can do, what is within one’s power, one only
develops the possibilities which are within oneself, one follows a program. To do something it is necessary to do more than what one can do. To decide, one must cross through the impossibility of the decision. If I know what to decide, there is no more responsibility to take. This is true of experience in general. For something or someone to arrive, it must be absolutely unanticipated. An event is possible only as impossible, beyond “I can [je peux].” I often write “impossible” with a hyphen between im- and possible, to suggest that this word is not negative in the way I use it. The im-possible is the condition of possibility of the event, of hospitality, of the gift, of the pardon, of writing. When something is foreseen, on the horizon, it is already over. Therefore it does not happen. This is also a political reflection: only what the available schemas fail to foresee happens.

Hélène Cixous: Responsibility, where you situate it and as you evoke it, is an absolute and blind responsibility.

Jacques Derrida: It is the responsibility of the other,7 but of the other in me before me. Of the other as me.

Hélène Cixous: It is an absolute yes to the other, and totally blind. You take on something of which you cannot measure the development, the effects, the destiny. You cannot do otherwise.

[How is power exercised with regard to the impossible?]

Jacques Derrida: It is a certain powerlessness [im-puissance], exposure to what is irreducibly other, as heterogeneous or as someone else. Exposure to the other can only take the form of powerlessness. The other is he or she before whom I am vulnerable, whom I can not even deny. I can not access the alterity of the other, who will always remain on the other side, nor can I deny his or her alterity. I can not say that I open the doors, that I invite the other: the other is already there. That is unconditional hospitality (foreign to politics and law, even to the ethical in the narrow sense). Hospitality of visitation and not invitation. The other has already entered, even if he is not invited. Between the conditional and the unconditional in general, there is at once radical heterogeneity and indissociability. This is what we have to deal with.

Hélène Cixous: For me, this exposure to the other takes the form of acquiescence: what translates, for you, in terms of powerlessness, is, for me, a power that accepts submission, infinite acceptation.
Jacques Derrida: It’s not a powerlessness of simple resignation, of weakness, but rather an abandonment.

Hélène Cixous: You arrive (to yourself) where you were not expecting (yourself).

[How is the puissance, this verb used by Hélène in a sentence you analyze at length in H.C. for life, conjugated with the impossible?]

Jacques Derrida: Puissance is one of these precious possibilities of the French language which are given to me, which I transform and put into play: I tried to elaborate a logic of the efficacy of such a puissance. A subjunctive operates here, bringing something about through the simple utterance of the vow. Puissance cela arriver. “May that happen”—and that happens in the text. The singularity of this puissance is, in its puissance, its power, more and other than performative. For there to be performative language, one must anticipate, master the conditions, agree upon the codes and conventions, which neutralizes, to a certain degree, the irruptivity of the event. The pure event defies performativity. The puissance at work in Hélène’s texts, this strange subjunctive, which is thus neither an imperative nor an indicative, is situated on this tangential line which I follow between the possible and the impossible. I try to think otherwise what the philosophical tradition, from Aristotle to Hegel, bequeathed us with regard to the possible. It is necessary to think otherwise the possibility of the impossible. This looks like a sort of verbal facility or playful paradox; it is for me the most serious issue in the world.

The Right to the Secret

[The theme of the secret occupies both of you: if one must let texts come, how then can the secret be protected?]

Hélène Cixous: There are many secrets. The word secret is full of secrets. There is the secret about which I know nothing, so secret and secreted away that I have no trace of it, except maybe in the form of dreams. There is a secret that is something known and hidden, impossible to reveal because the revelation would bring about the destruction of the secret thing, and also of life. The unknown of this secret is buried in night and silence; we will never know the face it would have if it could appear. The thing AboutwhichIknownothing [Don'tjenesaisrien] remains secret, this gift [don] which makes me who I am. One writes like a rescue effort to oneself in the dark: an act of despair because we know there is
a treasure to which we will never have access. How ignorant we are about ourselves! And yet we sign.

**Jacques Derrida:** This is an inexhaustible theme. I am the inheritor, the depository of a very grave secret to which I do not myself have access. The word or the writing that I send into the world transports a secret that remains inaccessible to me but that leaves its traces in all my texts, in what I do or live. I have often presented myself, barely playing, like a marrano, one of those Jews converted by force, in Spain and Portugal, who cultivated their Judaism in secret, at times to the extent of not knowing what it consisted in. This theme has also interested me from a political point of view. When a State does not respect the right to the secret, it becomes threatening: police violence, inquisition, totalitarianism. I take the right to the secret to be an ethical and political right. Now, literature opens this privileged place where one can say everything and avow everything without the secret having been betrayed: due to the fictional status of the literary work, even if I reveal to you the truth of my secret, I can always claim, by right, without being refuted, that “it is not I who speaks in my name.” This poses again the question of the “proper name.” Who speaks? Literature has this political right to say everything. It’s there, it’s published, but nobody can trust it, because it is fiction: I may have lied, invented, deformed, as is the case in all so-called autobiographical texts. A truth is deformed and transformed. Sometimes in order to access an even more powerful, more “true” truth. We can never prove—what is called proving—that someone lied. This right—to say everything without avowing anything—weaves a link of principle between literature and democracy. One can certainly object that, consciously or unconsciously, someone exploits literature which would not be this thing in itself, but a strategic function, a ruse to be able to deny, to avow without avowing. But if literature is only an immense weave of symptoms, what singular symptomatology! It fascinates psychoanalysts. From Freud to Lacan, this symptomatology overpowers them, it is stronger than them. Freud avowed: “It is the poets who teach me.”

**Hélène Cixous:** In front of the book there is a door. The inspired reader opens it, we think we enter. But the text works to dissimulate the thing in its folds and the author can do nothing about it. He would give his life to discover it. Literature is tragic, panicked by the necessity of pursuing the secret but in vain. In the end the book escapes, there is no end. The book is a letter on the run [lettre de fuite]. Literature owes its life to the secret, its mission surpasses it. As soon as one writes to exhume one secretes secrets.
Jacques Derrida: The secret is tied to what we said of the truth—and of the im-possible. It is not only that which one hides. It is existence itself. However close I am to the other, even in fusioning “communion” or erotic ecstasy, the secret is not revealed. The other is separated. We speak French, therefore Latin: secernere is to separate. This interruption is not negative. It makes possible [donne sa chance à] the encounter, the event, love itself. But we must not forget, the secret is told from other roots and according to other semantics in Greek or German.

Hélène Cixous: We could add secretion: the secret is not a diamond, it is in a state of continual secretion, it constantly augments itself: never can an author reach its heights.

Jacques Derrida: In Un ver à soie, which I published in Veils, face to face [en regard], if I may say so, with Hélène’s text (Savoir), which I had just read, the figures of the secret and of secretion command a trajectory wholly “autobiographical”: the journal of a trip to South America, my “history of truth,” childhood, religion, Judaism, the tallith (the shawl that Jewish men, and not Jewish women, must wear). This is just a recent example of all the sharing and separating [partages] that we can only evoke here.

Translated by Ashley Thompson

Notes

1 Souffler means to breathe, to whisper, including when one whispers a secret, but also to steal, such that the expression la parole soufflée can mean either to whisper or to tell (someone) the word (the secret word, the forgotten word) or to take or steal the word.—Trans.
2 Cixous is working here on the bivalence of the word vol, which means both “flight” and “theft.”—Trans.
3 The agrégation is the highest level French national academic exam; Cixous is referring to the oral part, which is traditionally open to the public.—Trans.
5 The letter “C” in French is a homophone of “c’est,” “it is,” such that the book title, published under the translation H. C. for life could also be rendered H, it is for life.—Trans.
6 Faire marcher means to make tick, to make walk, to give orders, but also to pull (one’s) leg.—Trans.
7 This expression, la responsabilité de l’autre, plays on the double genitive to signify both “the other’s responsibility” and “the responsibility for the other.” In French this latter sense is reinforced by the common expression être responsable de, meaning “to be responsible for.”—Trans.